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Nawiri Learning Brief: Market Systems Context including the role and potential of the private sector; Implications for addressing acute malnutrition in Kenya's Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs)

Background

This brief presents findings from the field study conducted to improve understanding on nutritious food value chain dynamics and their functionality for household (HH) access in Isiolo and Marsabit Counties. The objectives of the study were:

1. To understand the structure and dynamics of nutritious food value chains, including opportunities and barriers for private sector actors in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands' (ASALs) food system, to improve the availability of nutritious foods (milk, meat, fish, vegetables, fruit and eggs) and reduce seasonal food shortages.
2. To understand the barriers to more effective integration between producers and private-sector food processors and vendors within these value chains.
3. To explore ways of enhancing vulnerable HH use of the market to purchase food products, including attention to how this is influenced by gender norms.

The study combined a desk review (see associated CRS Nawiri Learning Brief: Understanding the Market Systems Context and its Implications on Acute Malnutrition in Marsabit and Isiolo Counties Desk Study), with primary qualitative research, including with private sector actors.

Summary Findings and Lessons Learned

- Study findings confirm that the main staple foods in Marsabit and Isiolo Counties include maize, milk and rice, while beans, meat and wheat are occasionally consumed. Other foods eaten included macaroni/ pasta, vegetables (e.g., kale, cabbage, potatoes, spinach), eggs and fish selectively, mainly in Loiyangalani and Marsabit town. Green grams, peas and some other vegetables (e.g., tomatoes) are consumed by fewer households (HHs). Sugar and fat/ cooking oil are commonly consumed within both counties. Food consumption by vulnerable HHs in the two counties is influenced by numerous factors including availability, production levels, accessibility (physical and financial) and dominant socio-cultural norms.
- Households (both men and women) accessed most staple foods from the markets, with processed foods sourced from Meru, Nairobi and Moyale before being sold through wholesalers to retailers and then to local village vendors. The private sector plays a major role supporting food availability at different levels in the food value chain, including production, processing and last mile (remote location) distribution. Food availability in both counties is highly determined by production at source, with infrastructure challenges (poor roads and long distances) and security threats significantly inhibiting consumer access to distant markets.
- Crop production inevitably remains limited in both counties given the predominantly pastoralist culture, dire water shortages and major challenges of frequent droughts, low rainfall, minimal access to finance and agricultural inputs, intercommunal conflict and livestock rustling, livestock diseases, poor extension services and weak access to production and preservation technologies. During the dry season when livestock are taken to the fora (grazing zones far from settlements) by men, this notably affects access to milk for women and children who stay at home.
- ASALs food systems remain characterized by high seasonality and perishability. In the wet seasons many food items are easily accessible, affordable and available, in contrast to dry seasons when they remain scarce and expensive, with local markets dependent on neighboring markets.
- Fishing is significant in particular areas, including along Lake Turkana in Marsabit County and the Ewaso Ng'iro River in Isiolo County, with fish commonly consumed fresh and sun dried along Lake Turkana. Fish processing remains low, however, with Marsabit County fisher folk processing sun dried fish fillets primarily for export markets in Busia. Even where potentially accessible, fish consumption is rare among many pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities given related, non-conducive cultural norms. As well, inadequate fishing capacity (knowledge and equipment), poor preservation measures and inappropriate transport systems remain major challenges in both counties.
- There are few private sector owned processing and value addition facilities in remote areas of Marsabit and Isiolo, where HHs may practice traditional preservation methods for milk and meat products. Challenges common to the value addition of milk, meat and fish in the two counties include inadequate knowledge, weak technical expertise on value additions and processing, expensive power costs, frequent power outages and limited access to water.

- In both counties, trading relationships exist between individual producers and aggregator groups. Key barriers to the integration of producers and traders in the milk value chain remain seasonality and the lack of preservation technology. Trader/ producer integration in the meat value chain is more streamlined than in other value chains but challenged by poor transport systems. Local fish traders in both counties purchased from producers on a cash basis and sold directly to consumers, and at times other traders, based on mutual agreements and trust.
- **Marketing, illiteracy, innumeracy and language barriers:** Major barriers facing financial institutions and large enterprises keen to deepen their engagement with existing, rural customers and/ or to acquire new rural customers, are illiteracy, innumeracy, financial illiteracy and language barriers which fuel misinformation and misunderstanding, particularly among less formally educated women.
- **Business models and supply and distribution networks:** Some financial institutions and large enterprises are deeply embedded in rural communities and/ or able to reach very rural customers. SMEs, however, seemed to face more challenges supplying and distributing their products and services among remote communities, due mainly to transportation costs resulting from vast distances and weak infrastructure.

Applying the Findings and Lessons Learned

Key Lessons Learned	Adaptation or implication	Link to TOC
1. The private sector plays an important but to date limited role in helping ensure food availability and access in remote locations. Businesses remain limited by technical and technological gaps, as well as large distances and poor roads in remote areas.	<p>1a. To enhance private sector reach and productivity Nawiri interventions will prioritize business technical assistance, including capacity building and technical support tailored to specific business contexts, to improve business capacity for enhanced nutritious foods' service provision.</p> <p>1b. Nawiri will support private sector supply of milk, meat and fish (where appropriate) and help achieve efficient aggregation models for the same. Cooperatives aggregating and selling these key products need support to access finance and strengthen capacity, to improve their reach and added value. Aggregation groups and</p>	<p>TOC P1, SP 1.2</p> <p>P4</p>

	traders provide opportunities to improve supplies of milk, meat and fish in both counties, and to improve the bargaining power of businesses engaged.	
<p>2. Existing market systems need to be enhanced and market links with supply chains strengthened, to ensure sustained nutritious food availability, access and affordability across seasons, especially in vulnerable communities.</p> <p>High perishability and seasonality continue to affect staple food availability.</p>	<p>2a. Nawiri will support private sector businesses to help ensure nutritious food availability and accessibility in vulnerable areas and across seasons. For example, by supporting food businesses with innovative preservation, storage and processing technology innovations and transportation, for milk, meat, fish and other key products. Nawiri plans to support the adaptation of contextualized, locally appropriate food preservation and processing techniques, to help ensure lean season availability and lessen the impact of seasonal food fluctuations.</p> <p>2b. Nawiri household cash transfer interventions under the Adapted Nutrition Friendly Graduation Approach are improving household access to foods available in local markets.</p>	TOC P1 & P4
<p>3. Crop production will remain very limited in the two counties, given the major challenges outlined above. Wider livelihood support is therefore required.</p>	<p>3. Nawiri livelihoods' interventions will support promising crop and livestock production opportunities, including by improving access to agricultural extension services and training (e.g., on best practice crop production and animal keeping), supporting the uptake of improved agricultural technology and practices (e.g., promoting drought tolerant crop varieties, soil and water conservation, water harvesting and rangeland management), as well as improving vulnerable HH and community access to finance, agricultural inputs and appropriate food preservation</p>	TOC P4

	measures.	
4. There appear to be some opportunities worth exploring to stimulate HH demand for nutritious foods, e.g., as seen in the high production but limited consumption of fish in Marsabit County.	<p>4a. Related Social and Behavior Change (SBC) on nutrition, the nutritional value of locally available foods, purchasing nutritious food, related production, preparation, processing and consumption, is ongoing and intentionally integrated across relevant Nawiri supported activities.</p> <p>4b. Nawiri SBC initiatives include supporting county governments to identify, train and support nutrition champions (including Community Health Volunteers and Early Childhood Development teachers) at sub-county levels; helping stimulate demand for nutritious foods and advocating the inclusion of nutrition focused policies in county government policy processes. For sustainability purposes, collaborative approaches will engage food system stakeholders in Marsabit and Isiolo County governments throughout the project.</p>	<p>P1, SP 1.2</p> <p>P3, SP 3.1 & 3.2</p>



[CRS Nawiri Learning Brief: Understanding the Market Systems Context and its Implications on Acute Malnutrition in Marsabit and Isiolo Counties Desk Study](#)



[See the full Nawiri desk study report on Understanding the Role and Potential of The Private Sector in Addressing Acute Malnutrition in Isiolo and Marsabit Counties](#)



[See the full Nawiri field study report on Understanding the Role and Potential of The Private Sector in Addressing Acute Malnutrition in Isiolo and Marsabit Counties](#)

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